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ABSTRACT

Procedures for developing selection standards for media center materials and for handling complaints that may arise are identified. To aid the librarian or school media specialist who needs assistance in censorship matters, a list of appropriate Wisconsin area agencies and associations is given, including their purposes, services, addresses, and phone numbers. It is recommended that each Wisconsin school district design an official board approved policy for the censorship of instructional materials which reflects the particular philosophy of the district; such a policy would contain a statement of objectives and responsibilities, a statement of selection procedures, and procedures for reconsideration of challenged materials. Guidelines for maintaining a public information program within the school, parent group, and community at large are offered as a means of reducing the necessity of defending selected materials. Should such defenses become necessary, recommendations for dealing with parental concerns about challenged selections are presented. Further suggestions can be obtained from the 14 library organizations, teacher federations, and civil liberties agencies listed. (FM)

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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SUGGESTIONS FOR DEALING WITH CENSORSHIP OF MEDIA CENTER MATERIALS IN SCHOOLS: A WISCONSIN PLAN

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Public Instruction and the
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Introduction

Education of students requires that materials be selected for use in instruction. The task of selecting appropriate media center materials is not an easy one. Even the most carefully and thoughtfully chosen print or audiovisual product can be subject to question.

This document focuses primarily on censorship as it relates to media center materials. Its purpose is to identify the procedures that should be followed in the development of appropriate standards of selection, to identify procedures for handling complaints that may arise, and to provide a list of appropriate agencies which can offer assistance in dealing with censorship in schools. Although similar suggestions are available from many sources, especially national ones, a need exists for a document with suggestions from a Wisconsin viewpoint.

Materials Selection Policy

The Department of Public Instruction urges every Wisconsin school district to have an official board approved policy for the selection of materials used in the instruction of its students. Such a policy expresses the philosophy of the school district and indicates the role of selection in furthering the aims of the philosophy. It includes the following major areas:

I. Statement of policy
   A. Objectives of selection
   B. Responsibility for selection
II. Statement of selection procedures
   A. Criteria for selection
   B. Procedures for selection
III. Procedures for reconsideration of challenged materials[1]

The Bureau of School Library Media Programs recommends that "Policies and Procedures for Selection of Instructional Materials, 1976," published by American Association of School Librarians, be used as a guide in the development or review of a materials selection policy.

A decision should be made at the outset as to whether the policy will cover all instructional materials or only those purchased by or housed in the instructional media center. This document focuses primarily on media center materials. While active participation by teachers, administrators, students and media specialists[2] in the development of a selection policy is always expected, a materials selection policy which includes classroom instructional materials such as textbooks and supplementary readers must be developed through a broad base of participation by teachers, such as subject area representation on the planning committee.

[1]Taken from "Policies and Procedures for Selection of Instructional Materials", American Association of School Librarians.

[2]The term media specialist refers to a person with appropriate certification and preparation in education, library and audiovisual fields, and with competencies to carry out an instructional media program.

The Bureau suggests that the materials selection policy:

a. be developed by media specialists, administrative staff, and teaching staff;
b. be approved by the school board;
c. be reviewed for currency every three years. The school board should review and approve any recommended changes;
d. provide the basis for in-service training for teaching and administrative staffs in the area of material selection and utilization;
e. be the actual basis for selection of instructional and recreational materials, including materials reflecting the cultural diversity and pluralistic nature of American society. The selection process should actively involve media specialists, teachers, and students;
f. reflect the needs of all students, including those with exceptional education needs.

It is also suggested that a note be made of the anticipated need served through purchase of the material such as the curricular area to which it relates or recreation use.

In addition to sources listed earlier, medi. specialists may wish to order Selection Policies: A Guide to Updating and Writing (1977).[3]

Reconsideration of Materials Policy

Every selection policy should include a section relating to procedures to follow in reconsidering materials which are questioned.

It is suggested that the reconsideration policy for materials:

a. be developed cooperatively with media specialists, teaching personnel, administrative staff;
b. be reviewed carefully before presentation to the school board--a dry-run through the policy is advisable;
c. be reviewed and approved by the school board as part of the materials selection policy and, as such, be reviewed every three years;
d. be presented in in-service training sessions to teachers and administrators, with invitations to school board members to attend.

An example of a citizen's request for reconsideration is found in "The Students' Right to Read," published by the National Council of Teacher of English. In addition, "Policies and Procedures for Selection of Instructional Materials," published by the American Association of School Librarians, includes a checklist for the school media advisory committee with the responsibility of reviewing the material in question.[4]

[3]Available for $2.50 from the Michigan Association for Media in Education, 401 South Fourth Street, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48103.

[4]Addresses of associations are provided under "Agencies or Associations Available to Assist You" given further in this document.

Public Information

One of the keys to meeting the challenge of the prospective censor is to maintain a good public information program within the environs of the school, parent group, and community at large. It is an endeavor that must not be taken lightly. The more involvement reflected in selection, the less likely the chance that schools will find it necessary to mount a defense of materials.

It is recommended that:

a. media specialists, teachers, and administrators promote the media program, not only within the school, but also to parents and the general community on a regular basis. In order to accomplish this task successfully, a media program of which the school and community can be proud should be developed. Remember: the trust and respect of the community is earned, not given.
b. media specialists personally get to know the editor or education editor of the local newspaper. This may be accomplished by a personal visit or phone call, initially, followed by appropriate news releases or other contacts. Remember to also make contact with the local radio and/or television station, as well.
c. the materials selection process be shared with parents and other interested parties. Don't make the process a mysterious secret. Aside from articles in newspapers and general school communications, consider a program for parents, students, and others that would define the process and answer questions.
d. teachers be involved extensively in the selection process. Teacher support is as important as that of the community.
e. the school principal be involved in determining appropriate policies, and once these are adopted by the school board, that he/she keep them in easy reach. While the media specialist should not make a pest of him/herself, periodic reminders of the existence of the policy are definitely in order.

Challenged Materials

Regardless of how carefully material is selected, it can be expected that at some point, some members of the community will express concern about the appropriateness of selected materials. It is important that steps in the process that have been approved be adhered to. If concern is expressed to a school board member or an administrator, that person should be sure to direct the complainant to the proper person, and <u>not</u> assume sole responsibility for reconsideration. The rules are set up to be followed.

When concern is expressed, it is recommended that:

a. the person expressing concern be treated with respect. Remember that such a person has the <u>right</u> to request that material be reviewed. Do not take the inquiry personally.

b. school personnel behave in an objective manner. Always follow the predetermined reconsideration policy.
c. the school administration be informed of the initial question immediately, and be kept informed of any further developments that may occur. Use this as an opportunity to reacquaint the administrator with the written and approved policy.
d. if the inquiry does reach the press, through proper school channels (such as the public relations officer or district administrator) accurate information from the school perspective is provided.
e. it be remembered that while a parent has the right to judge whether material is acceptable for his/her child, "no parent or group of citizens has the legal right to abridge the rights of other parents and teachers or children to have access to the information which is part of the educational program."[5]
f. complaints orginating within the school (from teachers, students, administrators, media specialists, and others) be governed by the school's written and approved policy for selection and reconsideration of materials.

[5]State Superintendent Barbara Thompson's letter to district administrators dated February 27, 1975.

Agencies or Associations Available to Assist You

I. Cooperative Children's Book Center (CCBC)

Purpose

The Cooperative Children's Book Center is a noncirculating research and examination center where individuals and groups may examine, read and evaluate children's books. The Center includes an extensive collection of the new juvenile trade books published each year, a core collection of older, significant titles, and a historical collection.

Specific Assistance Available

CCBC is especially useful to persons seeking professional opinions of specific children's books through CCBC's review file and its collection of professional periodicals. When the appropriateness of a specific children's trade book is questioned, the CCBC staff can reach for professional published reviews, provide a verbal or written list of these sources, a general summary of reviewer's evaluations, or copies of the reviews themselves ($.05 per xerox copy).

Recommended lists upon which the book appears (such as Children's Catalog), awards and/or distinctions given the book, other collections for which the book has been selected (Detroit Public Library, CCBC Basic Collection of significant and recommended titles, for example) can also often be cited for books which are in question, although this information occasionally takes longer to provide. Its availability is often dependent upon other factors such as the length of time since the book was published, the general nature of professional evaluations and reviews at the time when the book was initially published, or the response to the book beyond a certain locale or region. However, whenever this additional data can supplement basic review information, it will be provided for whatever assistance it can offer relative to that title. Information about the author and/or illustrator can also supplement the other information just described if this type of background information would be useful in certain circumstances.

When to Contact

The particular information described above should be sought as soon as a question arises within a school. Any conversations about a title in question become more fully informed discussions when such background information is at hand. Often a potential censorship problem can be taken care of in just this way. The CCBC staff can assist persons with such questions directed to the Center by phone and/or by mail. Be as specific and accurate as possible regarding the book title and author, the nature of the complaint, the specific information which will be the most useful, and the relative need for haste in response (within the hour, before the end of the day, or before the end of the week, etc.).

Telephone queries of this nature can be answered, in most cases, while a caller holds the line; more detailed telephone information will be given by a return call within the same day, if necessary. Letters concerning this type of query will be answered at once.

Whom to Contact

Librarian
Cooperative Children's Book Center
Room 4290
Helen White Hall
600 North Park
Madison, Wisconsin 53706
(608) 263-3271

II. Bureau of School Library Media Programs, Division of Library Services, Department of Public Instruction, State of Wisconsin

Purpose

The purpose of the Bureau of School Library Media Programs is to maximize the effectiveness of educational media programs in meeting user needs in all schools of Wisconsin.

Among the objectives of the Bureau is the initiation of strategies for schools in dealing with problems of censorship, and assistance in the development of selection policies. Upon request, bureau staff is available to:

a. confer with school media and administrative personnel in developing appropriate strategies to use in dealing with problems relating to censorship;
b. provide sample selection policies;
c. examine existing selection policies and make recommendations for revision;
d. provide consultative services to schools developing in-service programs and public information programs;
e. provide names and addresses of other agencies which may be helpful;
f. provide, through its fall and spring newsletters, appropriate information in the area of censorship.

When to Contact

The Bureau should be contacted at the time services are needed. Since the Bureau staff is limited, whenever possible, media specialists should plan to allow as much time as possible for a response (e.g. reviewing selection policies). Censorship inquiries needing more immediate attention will be given priority.

Whom to Contact

Director, Bureau of School Library Media Programs
126 Langdon Street
Madison, Wisconsin 53702
(608) 266-1965

III. Intellectual Freedom Committee, Wisconsin Library Association (IFC/WLA)

Purpose

The general purpose of the Wisconsin Library Association, Intellectual Freedom Committee is to:

a. monitor legislation affecting Intellectual Freedom in Wisconsin. The Committee will support legislation which positively reinforces freedom to read, and the library's role in such freedom;
b. act as a liaison between groups in Wisconsin who support the Freedom of Information;
c. provide continuing education for librarians and media specialists through WLA workshops as well as meetings, conferences, etc., sponsored by local libraries or groups;
d. provide assistance to libraries where librarians or media specialists are confronted with censorship problems whether the issue deals with written materials, audiovisual materials, or the freedom of speech.

Specific Assistance Available

There would be no cost to the school media specialist for IFC assistance. Specific assistance would include reference materials sent by the Chairperson; forms to use in case of a censorship problem to be filled out by all the parties involved; a copy of the IFC Handbook to use as a guide; visitations to the community by members of the committee to help present the Intellectual Freedom position; phone conferences; and referrals to the ALA Office of Intellectual Freedom for additional advice and consultation. The Committee will also provide assistance in formulating acquisition selection policies and matters relating to Intellectual Freedom.

When to Contact

A media specialist should notify the Chairperson of the WLA Intellectual Freedom Committee immediately. Many censorship issues can be avoided through proper preparation on the part of the librarian or media specialist.

Whom to Contact

Administrative Secretary
Wisconsin Library Association
c/o Madison Public Library
201 West Mifflin Street
Madison, Wisconsin 53703
(608) 266-6300

IV. American Library Association

American Association of School Librarians (AASL)

Purpose

The American Association of School Librarians is interested in the general improvement and extension of library media services for children and young people. AASL has specific responsibility for: planning a program of study and service for the improvement and extension of library media services in elementary and secondary schools as a means of strengthening the educational program; evaluation, selection, interpretation, and utilization of media as it is used in the context of the school program; stimulation of continuous study and research in the library field and establishing criteria for evaluation.

Specific Assistance Available

The Association will provide bibliographic information and written data providing a course of action for the library media specialist who is facing censorship problems in the selection and evaluation of instructional materials.

When to Contact

The library media specialist should contact the American Association of School Librarians to secure help and advice in the development of a selection policy for the purchase of materials for school media programs. In addition, the Association should be contacted when the selection of materials by library media professionals has been challenged.

Whom to Contact

Executive Secretary
American Association of School Librarians
50 East Huron Street
Chicago, Illinois 60611
(312) 944-6780

Office of Intellectual Freedom (OIF)

Purpose

a. To educate librarians regarding the importance of the concept of intellectual freedom as embodied in the LIBRARY BILL OF RIGHTS;
b. to make publicly visible ALA's concern with issues involving intellectual freedom and censorship;
c. to assist librarians through a wide variety of mechanisms to resist censorship pressures brought to bear on their libraries.

Specific Assistance Available

a. Practical advice on censorship and intellectual freedom issues.

b. The provision of educational materials on the First Amendment and censorship.

c. The availability of financial and legal assistance.

d. The practical advice offered by the OIF may assist the librarian in implementing a program of censorship prevention, and includes the development of a materials selection statement and procedures for handling complaints. In addition, the OIF can assist with the preparation of position papers, letters to the editor, etc., either from the librarian's point of view or from the ALA.

e. The educational materials sold by the OIF include the Intellectual Freedom Manual, published by ALA; the Newsletter on Intellectual Freedom, a bi-monthly update of intellectual freedom activities around the nation. Many other publications address specific censorship topics. OIF staff members are also available to speak at or participate in meetings or workshops whose subjects relate to the work of the OIF. If a staff member of OIF is requested to speak at a meeting or conference, the hosting institution is asked to pay any expenses incurred.

f. Through the Freedom to Read Foundation and the LeRoy C. Merritt Humanitarian Fund, the OIF is able to offer financial and legal assistance to librarians involved in intellectual freedom conflicts.

When to Contact

The media specialist is welcome to contact the OIF at any time for assistance with the development of safeguards against future censorship. If a censorship problem arises despite efforts to prevent it, the specialist should contact OIF immediately.

Whom to Contact

Director
Office of Intellectual Freedom
American Library Association
50 East Huron Street
Chicago, Illinois 60611
(312) 944-6780

Association for Library Service to Children (ALSC)
(formerly the Children's Services Division)

Purpose

The Association for Library Service to Children is interested in the improvement and extension of library services to children in all types of libraries. It is responsible for the evaluation and selection of book and non-book library materials and for the improvement of techniques of library services to children from pre-school through the eighth grade or junior high school age, when such materials or techniques are intended for use in more than one type of library.

Specific Assistance Available

a. Materials which may help to avoid problems (ALA policies and position statements, the Intellectual Freedom Handbook which suggests policies and procedures, bibliographies, etc.;
b. Information on specific materials being questioned (for example, ALSC may be able to provide information on lists on which materials appear, awards they have won, etc.);
c. Advice;
d. Support through letters, phone calls and, if needed, through our Freedom to Read Foundation, which finances court cases.

Whom to Contact

Executive Secretary
Association for Library Service to Children
50 East Huron Street
Chicago, Illinois 60611
(312) 944-6780

Young Adult Services Division (YASD)

Purpose

The Young Adult Services Division is interested in the improvement and extension of services to young people in all types of libraries. YASD has specific responsibility for the evaluation and selection of books and non-book materials and the interpretation and use of materials for young adults, except when such materials are designated for only one type of library.

Specific Assistance Available

a. YASD provides materials which will advise the librarian or media specialist working with young adults of available services and support for resisting local pressure and community action designed to impair the rights of young adult users.

b. YASD would attempt to provide support of a particular book's acceptance in the young adult library community, i.e.: has it appeared on any YASD lists of outstanding books or has it been used or read successfully elsewhere?

When to Contact

Contact should be made as soon as the problem arises.

Whom to Contact

Executive Secretary
Young Adult Services Division
50 East Huron Street
Chicago, Illinois 60611
(312) 944-6780

V. Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English (WCTE)

Purpose

The goal and purpose of the Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English is to provide professional journals, professional conventions, and professional in-service programs to keep the Wisconsin English teacher up to date in his/her discipline.

Specific Assistance Available

The WCTE has a special censorship committee. This committee will be able to supply expertise in problems of censorship, particularly in literature. There will be no cost to the member. There will be a minimal cost of any travel involved for nonmembers.

When to Contact

All avenues of the local district should be exhausted before help is asked for from our organization. In other words, assistance from the local teacher association, local English department, and media association should be sought before WCTE.

Whom to Contact

Dr. John Kean
Department of Curriculum and Instruction
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Madison, Wisconsin 53706
(608) 263-4610

VI. National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE)

Purpose

The purpose of this Association is to improve the quality of instruction in English at all educational levels; to encourage research, experimentation, and investigation in the teaching of English; to facilitate professional cooperation of the members; to hold public discussions and programs; to sponsor the publication of desirable articles and reports; and to integrate the efforts of all those who are concerned with the improvement of instruction in English.

Specific Assistance Available

NCTE has a Committee on Censorship. Its chairperson responds to emergencies by acting consultatively upon requests from schools. NCTE also provides speakers on the subject, two of whom are Wisconsin residents.

In addition, written materials such as "Students' Right to Read" are published and made available to media specialists.

Whom to Contact

Committee on Censorship
National Council of Teachers of English
1111 Kenyon Road
Urbana, Illinois 61801
(217) 328-3870

VII. Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC)

Purpose

The general purpose of the Wisconsin Education Association Council is to assist local affiliates and their members in the improvement of their economic and professional welfare, and in the promotion of instructional improvement.

Specific Assistance Available

The school media specialist, as any other member of the WEAC, would have available the counsel of his local affiliate, the UniServ director, and the WEAC regional coordinator. The latter two may have had experience in dealing with similar problems in a different location. The WEAC and NEA may have precise information and/or materials to assist with the problem.

If required, a media specialist would have the opportunity to present the problem to WEAC's legal division through their UniServ unit director, or to an appropriate committee or commission of the state or national organization.

When to Contact

As with most problems of this nature, it is best to seek assistance as soon as the problem takes shape. Early involvement provides an opportunity to explore potential solutions, and may eliminate the need to correct mistakes growing from emotional and time pressures the individual might face.

Whom to Contact

Addresses and phone numbers of the WEAC, the WEAC regional office, and the UniServ office are in the hands of the local WEAC affiliate. WEAC state headquarters is at 101 West Beltline Highway, Post Office Box 8003, Madison, Wisconsin 53708. The phone is: (608) 255-2971, or toll free: (800) 362-8034.

VIII. Wisconsin Federation of Teachers (WFT)

Purpose

The general purpose of the Wisconsin Federation of Teachers is to represent educational workers and education-related workers in their relations with employers; to provide service in improving professional status and legal services that may be necessary to clarify the capacities of teachers as employees and as professionals in relationships with students and with the community. The association represents teachers on school-board issues or in any situation that would affect the image of the teacher.

Specific Assistance Available

The type of assistance available would depend upon the particular problem. The association would represent a member who is involved in an existing censorship problem, including those that reach the point of litigation. Through the educational policy and research committee, WFT would be willing to provide input to assist instructors in formulating censorship policies. Information on policies in other school districts, both within the state and around the country, is also available.

When to Contact

Leadership in teacher organizations at the local level should be the first to be made aware of a censorship problem. If the problem has not been resolved in a reasonable time, or if it is necessary for superintendent or school board to be involved, then a WFT attorney or staff member could come in to meet with the superintendent or with the board to clarify the law.

The point at which the federation would provide counsel would depend on the situation. The lead would come from the teacher or principal or superintendent. The local chapter requests help from the central office.

Whom to Contact

WFT is regional. If the regional office is unknown, the central office should be contacted. The central office is:

Wisconsin Federation of Teachers
6525 West Bluemound Road
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53213
(414) 258-5990

IX. Wisconsin Civil Liberties Union Foundation (WCLU)

Purpose

The general purpose or goal of the Wisconsin Civil Liberties Union is to take whatever action is necessary to protect and preserve the Bill of Rights to the Constitution. Central to our concern is protection of freedom of expression and due process of law, both of which are essential elements in the censorship situation.

Specific Assistance Available

The Wisconsin Civil Liberties Union would consider court representation of the individual facing a censorship challenge or facing pressure for making decisions including or excluding materials from the school. The WCLU also assists with advice on how to handle the practical politics that surround attempts to have materials excluded from the public schools. WCLU has sent representatives of our chapters to testify before school boards considering policies which would unduly restrict First Amendment freedoms for librarians and teachers. WCLU will review policies which are applied to decisions on curriculum or media materials. The Foundation has a strong commitment to advocating protection of First Amendment rights in such controversies. There is no cost to the requester for services from our organization. If litigation is approved, the attorney donates his or her time as a volunteer and costs are paid out of a small foundation.

When to Contact

The most beneficial time for the media specialist to contact our agency is as soon as the censorship problem is identified. We can often deal very effectively with school officials concerning the problem without publicity and avoid a controversy if we are contacted soon enough.

Whom to Contact

Inquiries should be sent to the Wisconsin Civil Liberties Union, 1840 North Farwell Avenue, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53202, phone number (414) 272-4032. There are eleven volunteer chapters throughout the state.

X. Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT)

Purpose

The Association for Educational Communications and Technology is a professional membership association of individuals who handle and manage media collections and programs. AECT has a publications program providing information needed by and generated by its members.

Specific Assistance Available

In addition to furnishing a policy manual tentatively titled "A Policy Statement Selection Guidelines and Procedures for Challenged Materials — School Media Resources, Textbooks and Instructional Materials", AECT can write letters of assistance to members, and can connect the inquirer with persons who have had similar experiences. AECT has no plan for legal assistance on matters of censorship.

When to Contact

It is recommended that a member or media program contact AECT as early as possible. Depending on the nature of the problem the appropriate committee or members of AECT could be selected for involvement at the time the problem arises.

Whom to Contact

Executive Director
Association for Educational Communications
and Technology
1126 Sixteenth Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 833-4180

What You Can Do

A. Examine your own information about and attitude toward intellectual freedom for children and young adults. Remember that national studies and state surveys such as Mary Woodworth's, Intellectual Freedom, the Young Adult and Schools: A Wisconsin Study, 1976[6] have shown that the most effective censor is the media specialist him/herself.

B. Inform agencies responsible for continuing education of the need for further preparation in dealing with censorship issues. Contact:

1. The University of Wisconsin System, particularly those with library science and audiovisual programs

2. University of Wisconsin Extension
   Communication Programs
   610 Langdon Street, Room 220
   Madison, Wisconsin 53706

3. Private colleges

4. Cooperative Children's Book Center
   Room 4290
   Helen White Hall
   600 North Park
   Madison, Wisconsin 53706

5. Wisconsin School Library Media Association
   c/o Madison Public Library
   201 West Mifflin Street
   Madison, Wisconsin 53703

6. Wisconsin Audiovisual Association c/o Ralph Munger
   District One, Technical Institute - Eau Claire
   Instructional Materials Center - AV Department
   620 West Clairemont Avenue
   Eau Claire, Wisconsin 54701

7. Bureau of School Library Media Programs
   126 Langdon Street
   Madison, Wisconsin 53702

[6] Available for purchase from University of Wisconsin-Extension, Communications Programs, Room 220 Lowell Hall, 610 Langdon Street, Madison, Wisconsin 53706 for $3.50.

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